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Foreign
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USSR Weekly Review

26 January 1978

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RP UWR 78-004

26 January 1978

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USSR WEEKLY REVIEW

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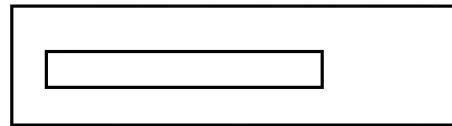
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Soviets at Belgrade: Round Three

The yearend recess of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe does not seem to have wrought any change in fundamental Soviet objectives. As before, the Soviets appear committed to seeing the talks through with minimal damage to their interests. Above all, the Soviets intend to avoid any new human rights commitments or any detailed review in the concluding document of their record in implementing existing commitments.

The Soviets appear determined not to permit Belgrade to interfere with their efforts to suppress dissidence. Candidate Politburo member Demichev passed the most recent signal of high-level determination to pursue a tough line in this area. Demichev reportedly told [redacted]

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[redacted] of a recent Central Committee decision to crack down on dissidence. In addition, the Soviets earlier this month indicated they intend to continue with the trial of Anatoly Shcharanskiy, whose case has inspired widespread attention and has become a test of Moscow's willingness to respond to foreign critics.

The Soviets moved quickly to seize the initiative as the Belgrade talks resumed on 17 January. In an effort to preempt the West, they submitted a short concluding draft, which is extremely one-sided and lists all major Soviet proposals with only a token nod at Western positions.

In all probability, the Soviets are prepared to retreat from their draft and settle for a terse document devoid of specifics. This would still permit them to offer their own interpretation of the results and significance of the Belgrade meeting--that is, that military and political security matters and questions of economic cooperation take precedence over questions of individual and human rights.

The Soviets are likely to push hard for the acceptance of one or more of those of their Basket I or II proposals that call for "special consultations" outside the CSCE framework. They are probably less interested in

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which of their specific proposals are adopted than in establishment of a forum or forums that would keep the East-West dialogue alive without having to deal with the human rights issues they have found so embarrassing. The initiation of "consultations" in another arena would distract attention from the next followup conference, at which they will again have to face the Basket III human rights issues.

Presumably the Soviet delegation will follow the path of least resistance and press hardest for those proposals that seem most likely to win a favorable reception among the Western and neutral and nonaligned delegations. We judge these at present to be the Basket I proposal on the limitation of the size of military maneuvers in Europe and the Brezhnev proposal for a conference on environmental problems in Europe. The Soviets presumably would hail the acceptance of either of these proposals as a general acceptance of their position that the Basket I and II issues are most central to the welfare of Europeans.

The quick submission of a draft document by the Soviets probably heralds a more general effort to seize the initiative as the negotiations resume. In addition to efforts to focus attention on their own proposals, they may also choose to inject negative material aimed at the US. Two possible sources of ammunition are the current intensive campaigns against the neutron bomb and against alleged US "interference" in the internal affairs of Italy and other West European countries.

This would permit them to pursue their efforts to divide the US from its West European allies. Soviet public commentary on Belgrade continues to focus on the difference between the "constructive" attitudes of most Western delegations and the "negative" approach of the US delegation.

The past record of Soviet negotiating practices makes it likely that the final shape of the Soviet position will not appear for some time. The unveiling presumably would take place sometime near the February deadline to which the Soviets seem intent on holding the conference.

The Soviets appear cautiously optimistic that they can attain their ends. Their public commentary has

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stressed that "as a rule, a constructive, businesslike atmosphere has predominated" at Belgrade. The implied exception to the rule, of course, has been the activities of the US delegation.

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